

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1. A method of displaying an image sent between subscribers of a communications system, the method comprising:

receiving image data corresponding to the image;

5 displaying a blurred view of the image; and

gradually displaying a sharpened view of the image in response to user input.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the image comprises an icon.

10 3. The method of claim 1, wherein the image is associated with a sender of an instant message.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the image is associated with a sender of an e-mail message.

15 5. The method of claim 1, wherein displaying a blurred view of the image comprises partially rendering the image data.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the image data is compressed to standardized image size.

20 7. The method of claim 1, further comprising setting preferences for receiving images.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein setting preferences comprises presenting a graphical user interface to the user.

25 9. The method of claim 1, further comprising allowing the user to reject the image.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein allowing the user to reject the image comprises presenting a graphical user interface to the user.

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11. The method of claim 1, wherein the communications system comprises an instant messaging system.

12. The method of claim 1, further comprising receiving the image data as an instant message.

13. The method of claim 1, further comprising displaying an instant message concurrently with the blurred view of the image in a separate dialog box.

14. The method of claim 1, further comprising displaying an instant message concurrently with the sharpened view of the image in a separate dialog box.

15. The method of claim 1, wherein receiving image data comprises receiving all image data for the image, and displaying a blurred view of the image comprises displaying less than all of the image data.

16. A computer program for a displaying an image sent between subscribers of a communications system, the computer program being stored on a computer readable medium and comprising instructions for:

receiving image data corresponding to the image;  
displaying a blurred view of the image; and  
gradually displaying a sharper view of the image in response to user input.

17. The computer program of claim 16, the computer readable medium comprising a disc.

18. The computer program of claim 16, the computer readable medium comprising a client device.

19. The computer program of claim 16, the computer readable medium comprising a host device.

20. The computer program of claim 16, the computer readable medium comprising a propagated signal.

21. A communications apparatus for displaying an image sent between subscribers of a communications system, the apparatus configured to:

receive image data corresponding to the image;  
display a blurred view of the image; and  
gradually display a sharper view of the image in response to user input.

22. A method for displaying a display item sent between first and second users of a communications system, the method comprising:

receiving, from the first user, a display item;  
obscuring the clarity of the received display item;  
displaying the obscured display item to the second user;

receiving input from the second user indicating a willingness to enhance the clarity of the obscured display item; and  
enhancing the clarity of the obscured display item in response to the input from the second user.

23. The method of claim 22 wherein the display item is an image.

24. The method of claim 23 wherein the image is an image chosen by the first user to represent the first user.

25. The method of claim 23 wherein obscuring the clarity of the image comprises reducing a resolution of the image to create a poor resolution image.

26. The method of claim 25 wherein enhancing the clarity of the obscured image comprises increasing the resolution of the poor resolution image.

27. The method of claim 23 wherein the image is compressed to a standardized image size.

28. The method of claim 23 further comprising setting preferences for receiving images.

29. The method of claim 28 wherein setting preferences comprises presenting a graphical user interface to the second user.

30. The method of claim 23, wherein receiving the image comprises receiving all image data for the image, and obscuring the clarity of the image comprises reducing the image data to less than all of the image data.

31. The method of claim 22 further comprising allowing the second user to reject the display item.

32. The method of claim 31, wherein allowing the second user to reject the display item comprises presenting a graphical user interface to the second user.

33. The method of claim 22 wherein the communication system is an instant messaging system.

34. The method of claim 33 further comprising displaying an instant message concurrently with the obscured display item in a separate dialog box.

35. A computer readable medium having a computer program stored thereon for displaying a display item sent between first and second users of a communication system, the computer program comprising instructions for:

receiving, from the first user, a display item;

obscuring the clarity of the received display item;

displaying the obscured display item to the second user;

receiving input from the second user indicating a willingness to enhance the clarity of the obscured display item; and

enhancing the clarity of the obscured display item in response to the input from the second user.

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36. The computer readable medium of claim 35 wherein the computer readable medium comprises a disc.

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37. The computer readable medium of claim 35 wherein the computer readable medium comprises a client device.

38. The computer readable medium of claim 35 wherein the computer readable medium comprises a host device.

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39. The computer readable medium of claim 35 wherein the computer readable medium comprises a propagated signal.

40. A communications apparatus for displaying a display item sent between first and second users of a communication system, the apparatus comprising:

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means for receiving, from the first user, a display item;  
means for obscuring the clarity of the received display item;  
means for displaying the obscured display item to the second user;  
means for receiving input from the second user indicating a willingness to enhance the clarity of the obscured display item; and  
25 means for enhancing the clarity of the obscured display item in response to the input from the second user.

41. An instant messaging program that allows a second user to receive instant messages and display items from a first user, the program comprising:

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a first interface element configured to obscure the clarity of a display item received from the first user and to display the obscured display item to the second user;

a second interface element configured to receive input from the second user indicating a willingness to enhance the clarity of the obscured data item; and wherein the first interface element is configured to enhance the clarity of the obscured display item in response to the input from the second user.

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42. The program of claim 41 wherein the display item is an image.

43. The program of claim 42 wherein the image is an image chosen by the first user to represent the first user.

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44. The program of claim 42 wherein the first interface element is configured to obscure the clarity of the image by reducing a resolution of the image.

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45. The program of claim 42 wherein the first interface element is configured to enhance the clarity of the obscured image by increasing the resolution of the obscured image.

46. The program of claim 42 wherein the image is in a standardized image size.

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47. The program of claim 42 wherein the program receives all image data for the image and the first interface element is configured to obscure the clarity of the image by reducing the image data to less than all of the image data.

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48. The program of claim 41 further comprising a third interface element for setting preferences for receiving display items.

49. The program of claim 41 further comprising a third interface element for allowing the second user to reject the display item.

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50. The program of claim 41 wherein the communication system is an instant messaging system.

51. The program of claim 50 further comprising a third interface element for displaying an instant message concurrently with the obscured display item.